

# The Curse of Quetzal

By J. U. Giesy and J. B. Smith

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"But where has he gone?" queried Connie with a woman's curiosity in such matters. "He hasn't wandered off or gotten lost, has he? Is he old or childish?"

"I don't know," I returned as I took a chair. "I never saw him or heard of him before. I was playing pool with an ancient Aztec, when Dayton inquired for the professor."

"An Aztec?" said Dual quickly. "Not really," I responded. "Mexican chap named Laredo, who said he had Aztec blood in him from away back." I went on and told what had happened.

Dual made no comment. He continued with his writing on the pad. He seemed to be putting down figures in a column and adding them up. For an instant I felt strange.

I had seen him do things like that before at the beginning of one of his odd adventures.

He would take a name, write it down, put a figure for each letter, and add them up, calculate a bit and calmly announce that something would or had happened. He called it the astrology of letters and numbers, and it gave results in his hands, as I knew.

"Now I watched him in silence. By and by it grew oppressive. I turned to Connie. 'I thought you were going to bed,' I remarked.

"I was, but Mr. Dual and I got to talking. I think I will now."

"Wait a moment," Semi begged. We both turned toward him. He finished his work with the paper and pencil, put the pad away and sat staring across the roof for a time. "Rather, I would suggest that you change your clothing for something free of restraint, yet warm enough to avoid feeling chill in the night," he went on.

Something gripped me by the throat. "Dual—" I began. "What—" "Because," he continued in a voice of subdued sorrow, "there is a woman in this house tonight who will need the support of a woman. Knowing you as I do, Mrs. Glace, I know you will go to her comfort and support."

He turned his strange, calm eyes in my direction. "Gordon," said he, "Miss Wingarde has suffered the loss of her father. The professor when found, will be dead!"

## CHAPTER II.

### The Eye of Quetzal.

"Dead!" I sprang to my feet.

"Dead," repeated Dual.

Connie sank back in her chair. She was suddenly pale. "Not really?" she gasped. "Oh, the poor girl! I must go to her at once, Gordon—"

I shook my head. "Not yet, sweet-heart."

I turned to Dual. "You set up the figure of his name?" I declared.

He nodded. "It shows that Mathias Wingarde will die on July 19. This is the 19th of July. From the figure death should have occurred before this, as it is now a quarter to twelve."

I shivered. Often as I had seen and heard him calmly announce the action of fate, it never ceased to affect me strangely.

"I'm going back down and find out," I said in a moment. "Connie, do as Dual suggests. If the worst has happened, that girl will surely need somebody to help her. It will be a terrible shock."

Semi straightened. "Go down," he said quickly. "Say little and keep your wits about you. Forget all save that you are a detective, Gordon. With your permission I shall tell Mrs. Glace what to do."

I turned to the door. Connie came to my side. "Be careful," she whispered. "Something terrible has happened. I feel it. Look at Mr. Dual. He looks as he always does when he is ready to drag something evil to light."

I nodded. I, too, had seen the strange, intent expression which had settled on Semi's face. I took her into my arms and kissed her and went out of the room.

It was midnight. What is there about the hour which always makes the unseen draw closer, the heart beat slow, the breath catch, the impossible become but the possible for the time? You have felt it, and I felt it that night as I passed down the hall of the hotel toward the stairs to the ground floor.

Our rooms were on the second floor, and but a short distance from the main staircase. The lights were on. Even some of the transoms still showed light within rooms.

Yet as I went with soft-footed tread along the hall I felt a cold wind which seemed to play upon the full length of my spine till the scalp on my head appeared to tighten.

Dead!

I could not doubt it. Too often had Semi Dual foretold the thing I was to find. I reached the staircase and turned to descend. I became aware of a group of men standing near the desk in the lobby of the hotel.

Before I was half-way down I saw that two of them held lanterns already lighted, and sensed that they

were canon guides attached to the hotel staff. Another of the party was Dayton, who seemed to be directing the others or giving them information. Still another was the clerk, who had come out from the desk and was shaking a vigorous head as I reached the lobby floor. A couple of bell-boys hung wide-eyed on the edge of the circle of men.

I advanced to the group quickly. "That's all," Dayton was saying as I came up. "Miss Wingarde and I were sitting on the veranda about eight-thirty as near as I can recall. One of the guides we had with us on our trip came to the foot of the steps and spoke to the professor."

"He went down and talked to the chap. We didn't hear what they said. After a bit Wingarde turned and called up that he was going a ways with the guide and would be back shortly. They walked off, and I haven't seen him since. Of course I can't speak from a deep knowledge of our aborigines around here, but it looks funny."

"Nonsense," the clerk cut in. "Those fellows the professor took on his trip are perfectly reliable men. There's no chance of their having done anything to him."

The two guides shook their heads in agreement with the clerk's pronouncement.

"Then he must have sustained a fall or something and been hurt," said Dayton. "Here it's after twelve and he wouldn't be apt to stay around the Indian village till any such hour. I fancy we'd best start a search. That's why I sent for you chaps," he addressed the guides.

"Then let's get at it," suggested one.

Dayton nodded. "One minute. I'll inform Miss Wingarde and go with you." He started for the stairs.

I followed and touched him on the arm. He turned with an impatient manner. "Go on," I said, speaking softly. "I'm Glace. You saw me in the poolroom this evening."

"Oh, yes!" he acknowledged.

"Well?"

"We began to mount the stairs. 'Just this,' I returned. 'Miss Wingarde is worried about her father. She'll have a dreary time waiting the results of this search alone. My wife would be glad to stay with her, and I'd be glad to help in the search, if you like.'"

"Jolly good of you," said Dayton. "If you'll wait a bit till I can ask Evelyn about it—"

He went on up and turned down the same hall on which our own suite was placed. Passing its door, we went on a few numbers farther down and Dayton rapped. Almost at once the girl I had seen earlier in the evening drew it open and he stepped inside. I waited. In a few minutes he was out.

"I have advised Miss Wingarde to accept, if you will be so kind," he advised me.

I led him back to our suite and inside. Connie, dressed in a soft, loose gown, was sitting in the chair where I had left her. Dual, at a writing-table, bent forward, and I knew that already he was at work upon those abstruse calculations which had so often served to point the way for suspicion to follow in the past.

He rose and I presented Dayton. Without delay Connie and I followed the Englishman back to the Wingardes' rooms. There I met the young girl who, if Dual was right, as I knew him too well to doubt, was already an orphan. With a word and a glance Dayton told her to keep up her courage.

He swung open the door. A man stood there—a tall, slender, swarthy man, clad in soft flannels. His hand was half lifted as though he had been on the point of rapping. Even before he spoke I saw it was Laredo.

"Ah, señor Dayton," he said in a manner totally free from embarrassment or restraint, "was passing and noticed the light. I was about to rap, oh, so lightly, if perchance you were awake, to inquire about the professor. Has he perhaps returned?"

Well, it was plausible enough. Dayton had asked him about Wingarde, and what more natural than, knowing them he should stop to inquire when he saw the light. Before Dayton could answer, however, I got in a question. "Your room along here, Laredo?"

I spoke shortly, I fear, for he lifted his brows slightly. "But yes, señor." "The professor has not yet been found," said Dayton in an undertone as he quickly closed the door behind him. "We are on the point of organizing a searching party. They are waiting for me below stairs now. Come on, Glace."

"One moment," said a voice I knew.

Dual had drawn open the door of our suite and now stepped into the hall. Clad in his soft, gray suit, with tie to match, soft, gray skirt with canvas shoes, he made a striking appearance as he approached us along the passage. We had all turned at his words and stood waiting. His strong

face was quite calm and his voice was impersonal in tone as he went on:

"In my estimation, Mr. Dayton and Mr. Glace can do more good by remaining here than they possibly can by joining the searchers. They, of course, will be led by the professional guides who are quite familiar with the region and can give it a thorough beating even at night. I am sure they can do quite all which will be essential for Professor Wingarde."

I saw at a glance that he had plainly overheard our remarks to Laredo. My heart leaped, for I knew that his action could mean but one thing, and that already his masterful hands had caught up the reins and would drive to the end of the venture. Dayton on the contrary seemed inclined to resent his interruption.

"But I say," he objected. "As Wingarde's friend and his partner on this trip, and all that, I can't turn the search over to a lot of disinterested nobodies, you know."

"It is precisely because you were his friend and partner on this trip that I wish you to remain here," said Dual. "Shall we not go down and see that the search is started promptly? After that I would desire to ask you some questions."

"You know, I can't just see what gives you the right to interfere in this, my good man," Dayton began.

Dual's eyes came up and rested steadily upon him.

"There are so many things you have not time to see now, Mr. Dayton. For instance, you do not appear to know that Professor Wingarde is already beyond the need of any friendship—"

"Is what? I say now—what do you—" Dayton stammered, and his voice rose.

"Softly," said Semi. "The news will be hard enough for the daughter, no matter how gently broken. The professor, you see, is dead."

"Dios!" It came in a gasp from my elbow.

I saw Laredo start a pace backward ward, a momentary expression of shocked surprise on his dusky face.

"My God!" chimed Dayton like an echo. "How do you know that? Has somebody found him?"

"Not that I know of," said Semi.

"In fact I think not yet."

"Then how do you know?" Dayton's face, which had paled, went suddenly red. "I don't understand all this."

"Not yet," said Dual. "Later. Come, let us go below."

I took Dayton's arm and led him along. I was conscious of Laredo behind us. So we went down again to the lobby and found the guides and several more of the guests who had been sitting up over a card game and had volunteered to join in the search.

They stood or sat in a close little group in the otherwise deserted lobby. The guides had set down their lanterns, and they shone sickly in the electric glare. All eyes turned toward us as we approached. As I half expected, Dual took control. He spoke directly to the clerk:

"I have suggested to Mr. Dayton that he place the search in the hands of the guides as the best parties to conduct it quickly."

Both the guides nodded and the clerk rubbed his hands. "Exactly sir. It would avoid delay and unnecessary excitement. I agree with you completely."

Semi turned on the two men. "Then select your parties from these gentlemen here and proceed. Continue till you find Professor Wingarde."

One of the two men spoke to his companion. "You take half of 'em, Bill, an' we'll get on the job." He stooped to pick up his lantern.

"But I say," Dayton again protested. "I don't think Evelyn would wish me to stay about here when her father may be in danger or injured—or worse. Wait a bit, you chaps."

I took him again by the arm. "Do as Dual says," I whispered. "He knows what he's doing. I think he's the only one of us who does."

"But who gave him the authority to take hold?" he retorted, growing more and more flushed. "Who is the chap? What—"

"He's a detective," I said, choosing the word for what I hoped would be its impression.

He shot me a sharp glance. "Eh? Oh, by Jove—"

"Well, do we go or do we stand around and chew the rag?" Bill's tone was one of palpable disgust.

Dayton turned toward him. "Go on," he said with a sudden decision. "I'll wait here. Stay till you find the professor. You'll be well paid."

At once they moved off. They left the hotel, went down the steps, and we followed them to the veranda. Through the night we could see their lanterns separate and go hobbling off in two different directions. With them went the bell-boys, who had joined the search while the clerk had turned his eyes for a moment.

Dual, Dayton, Laredo and myself remained standing at the head of the veranda stairs.

"Sit down, if you please," said Semi, taking a chair against the side of the house. "Gordon, bring up some chairs."

Both Dayton and I took one. I set mine so as to face Semi, and Dayton placed his at my side.

"I fancy I may intrude, is it not?" spoke Laredo softly.

"Not at all," Dual took him up. "I believe you knew the man who is missing. I should like you to remain."

The Mexican shrugged.

He dragged a chair over and sat down behind me in the shadow. Seated as we were, both Dayton and I were in the light from a lobby window. I found myself wondering if perhaps Dual had intended to place us all in such a position that our faces would be readily seen. I glanced about me just as he spoke.

"Draw in closer, gentlemen, if you

please. We shall speak softly of this matter."

Dayton and I complied. Laredo as a matter of course, followed. Dayton cleared his throat. "And now I fancy I'd better ask you to explain, Mr. Dual. You know I can't just see by what right you are taking your stand in this matter. It was jolly good of Glace to send his wife in to Evelyn and all that, but—"

"I told him to," said Semi.

"Eh?" Dayton fairly gasped.

"You see," Dual went on, "I knew Miss Wingarde would need a woman's support when her father was found, and during the waiting. Permit me now to add, that if you are really interested in the young woman's welfare, as I feel sure you are—"

"Rather. We're to be married, you know," said Dayton quickly.

"You will offer me all the assistance you can in clearing up this matter of his death," Dual paused.

"But that's what I can't understand," the Englishman rushed on. "You say he is dead, but I can't believe it. How is one to know that till he is found?"

"That," said Dual, "is a matter for later explanation. What you must do now is to tell me all about the last few weeks of your association with Miss Wingarde and her father."

"Why?"

Dayton was not inclined to quiet surrender.

"Mr. Dayton," said Semi, "it is a truth that at times the most trivial things in their seeming lead up to the tragedies of life. For years I have made a study of such matters. If there should, by any chance, be more in this man's death than an accident, perhaps some fact you might mention in your narration would serve to point out the real cause."

"If you are unwilling I shall not insist, but as we have some time to wait for the searchers' return, I think we may as well employ it in gaining all the facts of the past few weeks which you can recall."

"Let me ask you this," Dayton returned. "Are you and Glace detectives?"

(To be Continued.)

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